

COMMON Ground

PRESERVING OUR NATION'S HERITAGE SUMMER 2008



75 *years*

THE HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY



| BY C. FORD PEATROSS |

WITH OVER A QUARTER MILLION IMAGES representing more than 30,000 sites and structures, the Historic American Buildings Survey's collection at the Library of Congress is an unequalled repository of the nation's history, a treasure from its beginnings during the Great Depression. In the early days, states, towns, researchers, and historical societies paid 25 cents each for 8 x 10 glossies of places special to their heritage. In the 1960s and '70s, transferred to microfilm, the collection saw even broader use, and today it is on the web. From skyscrapers to slave cabins, from cathedrals to kivas, the breadth of America is online and free to the public, captured in time through measured architectural drawings, historical research, and large-format, museum-quality images, at high resolution. **AT THE LIBRARY IT IS** part of our mission to preserve this material and make it accessible to as many people as we can. In a survey a few years ago, the HABS collection—together with its companion collections from the Historic American Engineering Record and the Historic American Landscapes Survey—was among the ten most used of our digital holdings. **AS DIRECTOR OF THE LIBRARY'S** Center for Architecture, Design and Engineering, Prints and Photographs Division, I view this material from a rare perspective: that of an insider. I'm well acquainted with how the collection took shape, and with who uses it today. Charles Peterson, the National Park Service architect largely credited as the creator of HABS in the 1930s, was instrumental in developing the justification for the program. But his personality and presence, even now, overshadows the role of another important individual: Leicester Holland, the library's chair of fine arts—a pioneer aviator, classical archeologist, and medieval scholar who chaired the Committee on Historic Buildings of the American Institute of Architects. Holland started the Pictorial Archives of Early American Architecture, collecting gift images from photographers in the 1920s. Today, as then, the genius of the architectural collections is in the cataloging system, which Holland had well underway by the time Peterson came on the scene. **HOW DO YOU CATALOG** an image of a building? The name of a structure can change over its life. The identity of the architect is often uncertain, the client vague and sometimes unknown. The firm ground is the physical location. Holland came up with a system of state, county, city or vicinity, and finally, building name, which he had up and running by the

time the HABS material started pouring in. It is one of the reasons the program got off to such a quick start. **WHEN THE LIBRARY MOVED TO DIGITIZE** in the 1990s, the Kellogg Foundation offered to send K through 12 teachers here over a series of summers, to determine which materials would best serve classroom needs. HABS and its companion collections ranked near the top of the list, digitized thanks to the generosity of the foundation and other donors. The digitization caused a revolution over the last decade, with teachers creating online lesson plans incorporating the materials. What energizes students—what they didn't have in the pre-electronic age—is immediacy. In the past, textbooks filtered everything. Now students have a direct connection. An eighth grader examining

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photographs of the Alamo, a sod house, or Thomas Jefferson's Monticello can see immediately how people lived. As a result, the students do better work. And the teachers, evaluated on how well they promote primary research, get better grades, too. Everybody wins. **FOR THE PAST 33 YEARS**, I have watched this collection adapt to a changing world. That is its strength. Yet it is still largely untapped in terms of potential. Architects have always used the collection. Historians use it, genealogists, a broad range of researchers. **IT IS THE UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTERS**, though, that are particularly satisfying. It was never in the planning, but sometimes someone discovers Dad's house here. It makes people realize that the material offers something wonderful for everyone. Dad's house. Our house. **THE HABS COLLECTION CAPTURES** the story of America, some of it gone, some of it, happily, still with us. Making the collection available to the wider world is something I find incredibly satisfying, and a privilege.

C. Ford Peatross is Director of the Center for Architecture, Design and Engineering, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.



ARTWORK ON THE GROUNDS OF SPRING GROVE CEMETERY IN CINCINNATI, OHIO. NANCY GROW

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Front cover: Oakland Plantation, built in 1827, in Louisiana's Cane River National Heritage Area. **Back cover:** The Coincoin-Prudhomme House, also in Cane River, one of the few remaining examples of a raised Creole cottage with Norman architectural influences. It is also believed to have been the home of Marie Thérèse Coincoin, a former slave who had her own slaves after becoming a plantation owner. JACK BOUCHER/NPS/HABS

NEW DEAL FOR PARKS

CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS CELEBRATES ITS 75TH ANNIVERSARY

It's a sunny spring day in Virginia's Prince William Forest Park, a log cabin filled with a dozen or so radios from the 1920s and '30s, one of them a build-it-yourself crystal set. "Building your own" was popular during the Depression, often out of necessity. The simple receiver, with nothing to enhance its signal, testifies to a time when people didn't give up and learned how to make do. And now, during "1930s heritage day" at the national park, visitors see ample evidence of that resilience in the heart of a project borne of Depression-era ingenuity: a camp constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

for urban dwellers and impoverished inner-city children. The areas were designed to give the kids "a place to have a summer camp and give them some opportunities they otherwise wouldn't have," says Andrew Tremel of Prince William Forest Park (for-



Far left: Enlistee grades a road in Mammoth Cave National Park, around 1935. Near left: Surveying for a new road for the Blue Ridge Parkway.

THE CCC, AS THE CORPS WAS KNOWN, WAS ONE OF MANY PROGRAMS INSTITUTED UNDER PRESIDENT FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT'S New Deal to help the fallen nation get back on its feet. Established in 1933 as part of the Emergency Conservation Work Act, the CCC worked for both the needy and the environment—by sending armies of unemployed young men into forests and parks across the country. In the program's nine years, over 500,000 enlistees developed 52,000 acres of public campgrounds, laid 89,000 miles of telephone lines, and planted more than 2 billion trees. The state park system was still a new idea, but by the time the program ended in 1942, there were 800 new state parks.

"The effort of focusing three and a half million young men on our natural resources was never more dramatic," says Sally Prouty, president of the Corps Network, a nonprofit that represents 113 service and conservation corps groups still active today—"direct descendants" of the CCC—including the Public Lands Corps, cosponsored by the National Park Service.

Writes Stan Cohen in *The Tree Army*, a CCC history: "It has been said that without CCC help, it would have taken fifty years to accomplish what was done in nine." Not only did state parks benefit, so did the national forests—and parks. So much so that the 1930s are to some the "golden years" of the National Park Service.

The Army managed the camps, but their superintendents worked with NPS staff to devise projects that could be completed during the typical six-month CCC enlistment period. Around 50 national park sites benefited. Kentucky's Mammoth Cave National Park and Virginia's Shenandoah National Park (both authorized in 1926) weren't established until after the CCC had built many of their facilities and trails.

Perhaps the most notable NPS achievements were the Recreation Demonstration Areas—though only two remain in the National Park System today—created to buy land from needy farmers to build recreational areas

merly Chopawamsic Recreation Demonstration Area), located in what are now the outer suburbs of Washington, DC.

Prince William, one of 46 former RDAs—most are now state parks—was one of the nation's largest before becoming a public park in 1946. Over 2,000 CCC enlistees built five cabin camps here on 11,000 acres, some still used by park visitors today just as they were in the 1930s and '40s. Blending unobtrusively into the wooded surroundings, the clusters showcase the dominant style of CCC architecture, known as rustic or "parkitecture." The hand-hewn structures, sparse and open, were a hit with the public. "They blended with the environment—that was really attractive to

Right: Oil painting by Harry Rossoll—a Forest Service illustrator best known for creating Smoky the Bear—first exhibited in 1939 at the Golden Gate International Exposition in San Francisco.



FAR LEFT: MAMMOTH CAVE NP MUSEUM COLLECTIONS/NPS. NEAR LEFT: ALLAN RINEHART/NPS HISTORY COLLECTION. RIGHT: CCC LEGACY



LEFT AND FAR RIGHT: MAMMOTH CAVE NP MUSEUM COLLECTIONS/NPS, NEAR RIGHT: DAVID ANDREWS/NPS (2)

people, yet they were functional too,” says Linda Flint McClelland—a National Park Service historian and author of *Building the National Parks*—adding that naturalistic rockwork is also a signature element of the CCC style, the craftsmanship so fine it is hard to tell sometimes what is natural and what is manmade.

WHO WERE THE YOUNG MEN ENLISTING IN THE CCC? RANGING IN AGE FROM 18 to 25 years, they came from families on relief and without much in the way of job skills or educational opportunities. The CCC gave them both. Operating under the motto of “We Can Take It,” the men



Left: Lloyd Vincent, an enrollee at Mammoth Cave, sharpens a saw. Above: Details of cabins at Prince William Forest Park.

learned and practiced the building trades: carpentry, bridge and road construction, electrical wiring, plumbing, surveying, and more. Sometimes they learned from LEMs—local experienced men—hired by the National Park Service. The program also offered extension courses in auto mechanics, English, forestry, psychology, and journalism. Some of the enrollees spent their free time—in temporary barracks where they lived in the camps—working on the CCC national newspaper, *Happy Days*.

The families received aid too, a whopping \$25 of the \$30 an enlistee earned each month. Labor groups thought the dollar-a-day salary too little, but the men got food, clothing, housing, and medical care all free of charge. For some, it was a lot better than the conditions they came from. “The average enlistee gained 25 pounds during his six months of service,” Tremel points out.

There was a lot of hunger to go around. With unemployment at an all-time high after the 1929 stock market crash—and with a drought turning much of the nation’s breadbasket into a dust bowl—President Roosevelt received 15 million letters from desperate Americans asking for assistance. But they wanted to work in exchange for the help, and the New Deal programs gave them a sense of accomplishment. “It makes us feel like American citizens to earn our own living,” wrote one employee of the Works Progress Administration, asking the president to continue the program.



Above: Carving a sign with a chisel and hammer at Mammoth Cave, around 1937.

FIRST LADY ELEANOR ROOSEVELT TRIED TO FIND EMPLOYMENT FOR JOBLESS women, too. With the help of social worker Frances Perkins, she opened Camp Tera, at Bear Mountain State Park in New York’s Hudson Highlands, despite being mostly scoffed at for the idea. The project, nevertheless, slowly took off and by 1936 there were 90 “She She She Camps.” Though not official CCC camps and much smaller, they did serve over 8,000 unemployed women. No conservation work was involved, though, as the women focused on domestic skills such as cooking, cleaning, and sewing.

Not only did the CCC and the New Deal have a positive impact on the broke and the hungry, they also changed the way the country looked at conservation—and the arts. Franklin D. Roosevelt, much like his cousin and former president Theodore Roosevelt, was a devout conservationist who wanted to get people involved in better-

ing the natural world. Suddenly, conservation was for everyone. “The effect of the New Deal programs was amazing, not just on conservation, but on arts and culture, too” says Catherine Lavoie, chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey of the National Park Service—the only New Deal cultural program still in existence—which also celebrates its 75th anniversary this year. Founded under the FDR Civil Works Administration and Works Progress Administration, HABS was created in part to help out-of-work architects, its intention to document the story of America through its built environment.

Environmentalism wasn’t the only thing stifled by the impending war—so was the New Deal. The CCC began to wind down in early 1940, becoming defense-oriented in preparation for the upcoming conflict. Camps sprung up at military bases as enlistees were pressed into building airfields and artillery ranges. After Pearl Harbor, all the camps were offered to either the Army or the Red Cross. In June of 1942, despite Roosevelt’s wishes, Congress abolished funding; the program was officially over. With the economy on the rebound—and many of the 18 to 25 year olds heading over-



“THE EFFECT OF THE NEW DEAL PROGRAMS WAS AMAZING, NOT JUST ON CONSERVATION, BUT ON ARTS AND CULTURE, TOO” SAYS CATHERINE LAVOIE, CHIEF OF THE HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE—THE ONLY NEW DEAL CULTURAL PROGRAM STILL IN EXISTENCE—WHICH ALSO CELEBRATES ITS 75TH ANNIVERSARY THIS YEAR.

Above left: Cabin cluster in one of the five CCC-built camps at Prince William Forest Park. **Center:** A CCC enlistee fits logs for the La Croix Guard Station in Minnesota’s Superior National Forest. **Above right:** Building a culvert headwall at Mammoth Cave. **Right:** Cabin detail at Prince William Forest Park.

NOT ONLY DID PEOPLE GET INTERESTED IN THEIR ENVIRONMENT, THEY STARTED thinking about it differently, too. As the CCC effort stretched into the late 1930s, criticism arose that instead of conserving parks, the work was overdeveloping them. “The corps created a national debate,” says Neil Maher, author of *Nature’s New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement* and an associate professor in the federated history department at the New Jersey Institute of Technology, a joint program with Rutgers. Maher—who spoke on the CCC’s legacy at a recent conference on the past and future of the parks in Charlottesville, Virginia—points out that the Wilderness Society arose directly out of this debate, along with a new term: environmentalism. Though World War II stifled the start of the movement of the same name—which went into full swing in the 1960s, the era it is synonymous with—the spark had been ignited.

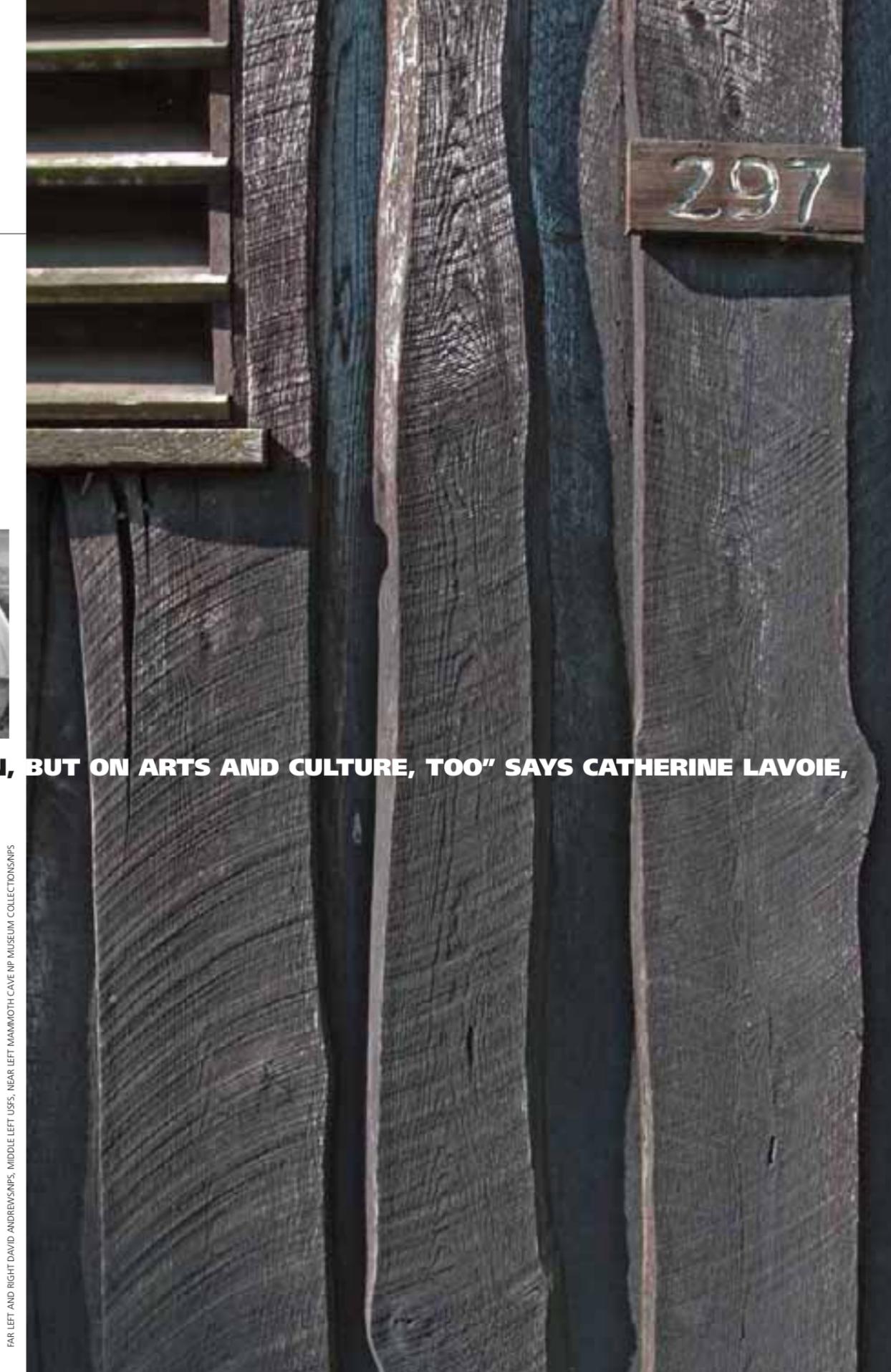
seas to fight—the need for the program was no longer as intense.

But it had done the job. Thousands of young men were given the chance to earn a steady paycheck and the education to earn a decent living. “They were given an opportunity to amount to something, to have some success after their term of enlistment,” Tremel says.

ALTHOUGH MANY PEOPLE TODAY AREN’T FAMILIAR WITH THE CCC, ITS LEGACY endures through the sheer abundance of recreational facilities that are still with us—along with the stories of the men who built them. “When we are enjoying public lands, there are so many reminders, even 75 years later,” Prouty says.

To learn more about Prince William Forest Park, go to www.nps.gov/prwi/; about Mammoth Cave National Park, go to www.nps.gov/maca/. For inquiries about CCC-related National Register or National Historic Landmark listings, please e-mail nr_reference@nps.gov. To find out more about getting involved with a service corps, go to the Corps Network website at www.corpsnetwork.org, or call (202) 737-6272. Contact Neil Maher at maher@njit.edu. HABS has conducted a study of CCC sites in the Washington, DC, area; for more information, email lisa_davidson@nps.gov.

FAR LEFT AND RIGHT DAVID ANDREWS/NPS, MIDDLE LEFT USFS, NEAR LEFT MAMMOTH CAVE NP MUSEUM COLLECTIONS/NPS





OVER 200 TREES WERE PLANTED, LAND WAS SET ASIDE AS A PRESERVE, AND MONUMENTS WERE FRAMED WITH FOLIAGE.

MUSEUM WITHOUT WALLS

PASTORAL TREASURE BECOMES A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

First-time visitors to Cincinnati's Spring Grove Cemetery might be surprised by what they see. Yes, there are plenty of old headstones to read, but among and around them is a wealth of art, too. So much so that the cemetery's 733 acres are often called a "museum without walls." The landscape itself is a work of art. "There's a blend of artwork, sculptures, and memorials, along with a tremendous collection of plant material," says Thomas Smith, executive vice president of the cemetery. That's one reason why Spring Grove, the nation's second largest resting place, became a national historic landmark last year.

THE NHL NOMINATION ALSO NOTES THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WHAT DESIGNER Adolph Strauch called his "landscape lawn plan"—a style that cemeteries around the world emulated. "People were trying to figure out a balance between nature and monuments at the time," says David Charles Sloane, author of *The Last Great Necessity: Cemeteries in American History*. "He took Spring Grove a step towards doing that."

The non-denominational graveyard was consecrated in 1845 as one of the Midwest's first rural cemeteries, mirroring a movement sweeping the nation as more and more communities—awed by the picturesque Mount Auburn Cemetery, founded in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1831 and now an NHL—wanted a place outside the city to bury their dead. Before the movement, most people were buried in the many town churchyards, which were getting crowded

THE CINCINNATI HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY LED IN THE CREATION OF SPRING Grove, the group determined that the city have a picturesque cemetery of its own. Its members visited noted cemeteries across America and Europe to gather design ideas and inspiration. They didn't just want nice landscaping—they wanted beauty comparable to that of Père-Lachaise, the famous Paris graveyard. And the rest of Cincinnati was right on board, putting down \$20,000 for plots before construction even started.

But by the 1850s, cemetery executives were concerned that the plethora of monuments and memorials was starting to detract from the picturesque idea, a view that was heartily supported by Strauch when he offered to redesign Spring Grove in 1856, which he said had "the appearance of a marble yard where monuments are for sale."



VISITORS TODAY CAN STILL SEE "LANDSCAPE PICTURES" AMONG THE PONDS, THE ARCHITECTURE, AND THE MEMORIALS.

Far left: Snow-covered monument in Cincinnati's Spring Grove Cemetery. Near left: Infrared photo of Rock Bridge crossing over Geyser Lake, one of the cemetery's 12 ponds.

and did not have the abundant scenery to recommend them. Cincinnati, stricken by cholera epidemics in both the 1830s and 1840s, was no exception to the trend.

Like most graveyards of the time, Spring Grove was garden-like, each grave a little plot with its own set of garden accessories—from flowers and trellises to paths lined with shells and crushed

LEFT WAYNE BRUNS, RIGHT JIM KRAMER

marble. Some graves even had toys and knickknacks. Instead of looking beautiful, the place looked cluttered. Strauch limited the height of future monuments and gravestones, removing fences around plots and banishing private gardeners. “He turned it from a mosaic into a centralized landscape,” Sloane says.

But the biggest changes were the horticultural ones, with the goal to give the graveyard a more naturalistic appearance. Over 200 trees were planted, land was set aside as a preserve, and monuments were framed with foliage. Visitors today can still see “landscape pictures” among the ponds, the architecture, and the memorials.

“Strauch’s work symbolizes the shift from the picturesque to the beautiful,” Sloane says. The new look, once finished, was simplified and pastoral. The place received international praise—Frederick Law Olmsted called it a source of inspiration and the directors of London’s Abney Park Cemetery declared it “the finest cemetery in the world.”

TODAY, HORTICULTURE STILLS PLAYS A KEY ROLE. “IF ANYTHING, IT’S INTENSIFIED,” Smith says. Renamed the Spring Grove Cemetery & Arboretum in the 1980s, its grounds are home to over 1,200 species including 23 champion trees, making it a favorite study spot for landscape design classes. Around 150 trees and shrubs are planted each year, along with 4,200 annuals and 20,000 bulbs.

Strauch, a Prussian immigrant who landed in Cincinnati by happenstance after missing a train to Niagara Falls from Texas, is buried in the cemetery along with its 200,000 other eternal occupants, including Abraham Lincoln’s Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon P. Chase, U.S. Attorney General Henry Stanberry, and Quaker abolitionist Levi Coffin. His grave is on one of the cemetery’s islands, not too far from the Romanesque Revival-style Norman Chapel, built in 1880, which annually has three to four times more weddings than funerals.

Spring Grove also has a variety of tours to show off its beauty to the public, among them a nighttime event called the “Full Moon Tour.” Ghost hunters occasionally ask permission to come after hours in search of spirits, but “no one to my knowledge has ever seen any,” Sloane says.

To learn more about Spring Grove, go to www.springgrove.com. To learn more about the National Historic Landmarks Program, or to see a list of its 2,500 sites, visit the National Park Service website at www.nps.gov/history/nhl.



JIM BROCKMAN

Above: One of several historic mausoleums in Cincinnati’s Spring Grove Cemetery

A Storied Hotel's Second Chance

History Comes Alive Through Reopening of Pennsylvania Mountain Retreat

MOST PRESERVATION TAX INCENTIVE PROJECTS FIND THEIR WAY INTO FOLDERS when all is finished, but one recent project, the Bedford Springs Resort, took up an entire box. It required a lot of reports and photos to document the renovation of the six-building connected structure, stretching almost a quarter of a mile. Especially one that spent 22 years abandoned.



Above: The hotel today. Right: Circa 1840 pen and sepia drawing by German immigrant artist Augustus Kollner.

The national historic landmark, in Bedford, Pennsylvania, was shuttered in 1986 and not in good shape when Bedford Resort Partners LTD first saw it in 1998. Animals had moved in, flood damage was rotting the beams, and the lack of maintenance had taken its toll on the 2,200-acre property. But envisioning what it could be, the group bought it for \$8 million anyway. The hotel reopened in July 2007. "We saw it as a rare opportunity to restore one of the country's great mineral springs properties," says Keith Evans, the group's managing partner. "There aren't that many left." Says Mindy Crawford, executive director of Preservation Pennsylvania, "It's an incredibly impressive structure—just the sheer size makes it unique."

The 23-month rehabilitation, done by 3 North design firm, returned the hotel to its circa 1905 appearance. Structural damage was repaired, asbestos removed, masonry repointed, a new spa addition built, and several outbuildings stabilized. "We would pull something off and not really be sure why it had still been standing," Evans says of the renovation's structural challenges. Since the property is a certified historic structure, the project income producing,

and the renovation in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, the group got a 20 percent tax credit towards the \$120 million price tag.

JOHN ANDERSON, A BEDFORD SPRINGS DOCTOR, OPENED THE RESORT IN 1803. With its location near seven springs, he knew he could lure travelers with promises of the curative waters. By the mid-1800s, it was known as the "Carlsbad of America," a reference to the European spa city. "Everyone who was anyone stayed there," Crawford says.

President James Buchanan, who stayed often in the summer, was especially fond of the place. He received the first transatlantic cable here, from Britain's Queen Victoria, which he read aloud to the guests. The hotel played host to six other presidents and a variety of other figures, some seen in the 400 vintage photographs hanging in the halls.

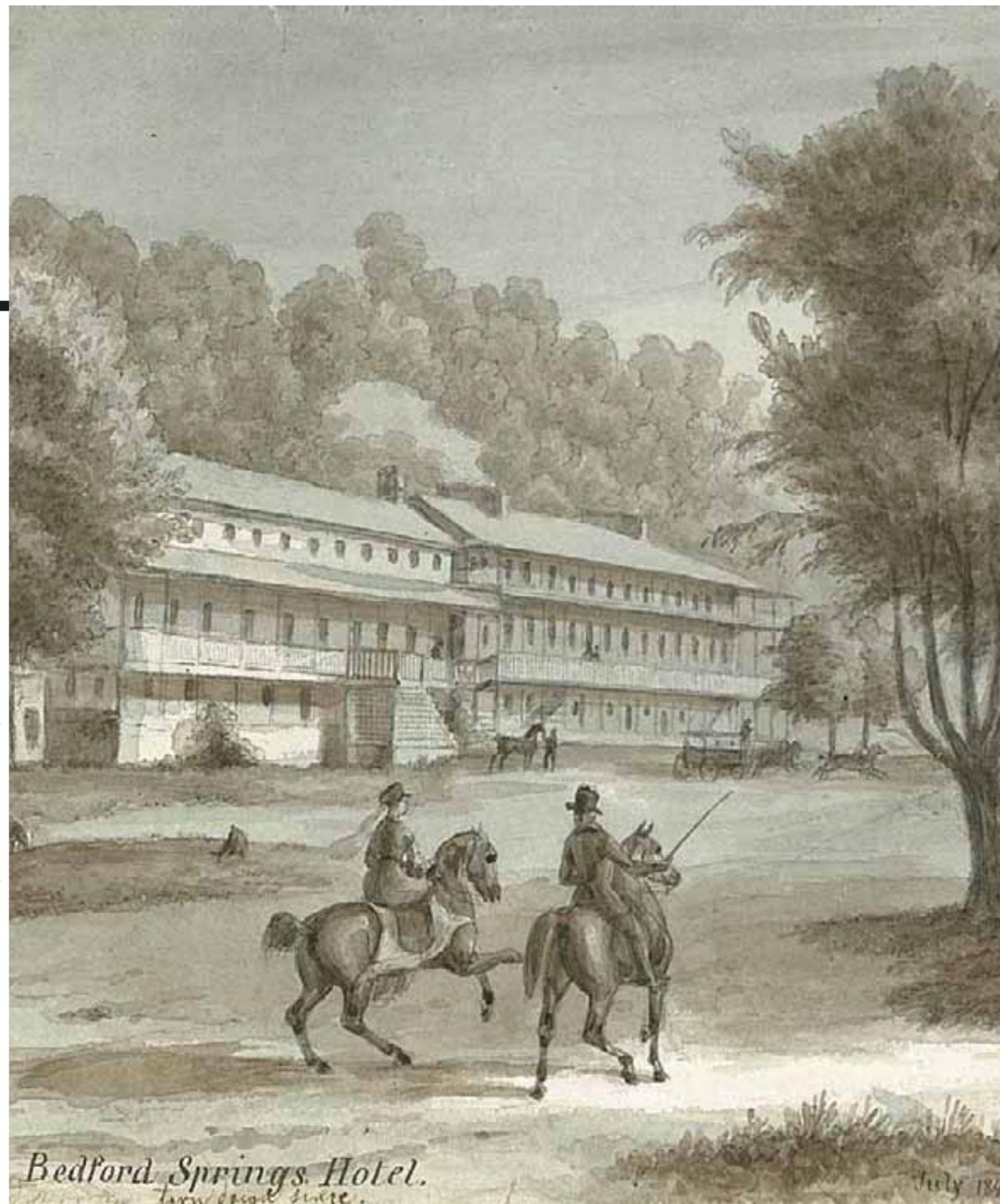
The resort's success continued well into the 1900s, with the spring water still a huge attraction. But the Great Depression, when so many could no longer afford long vacations, started a decline, sending the resort into foreclosure in the 1930s. In the 1940s, it wasn't a hotel at all but used for war-related purposes.

Revived as a resort in the 1950s, it continued to attract tourists, but with increasing difficulty as the resort era died, and in 1986 finally closed its doors, seemingly for good. Now, however, guests are flocking to it once again, with plenty of demand right from the reopening.

HISTORY IS EVERYWHERE IN THE 216-ROOM HOTEL, FROM THE 1800S COLOR postcards to the windowpanes where brides etched their names to see if their wedding ring diamonds were real. But today's guests aren't roughing it in any sense. Each guestroom includes a high-definition television, an iPod docking station, and wireless internet access. In the Springs Eternal spa, guests enjoy the famous spring waters through various baths and detox treatments.

Perhaps the best thing is the fact that the hotel is no longer a lonely eyesore along the highway, but instead a thriving getaway, says William Defibaugh, president of the Bedford Historical Society. "I think this time it's here to stay," he says.

To learn more about the NPS federal historic rehabilitation tax incentives program, which has leveraged more than \$45 billion in private investment since 1976, go to www.nps.gov/hps/tps/tax/index.htm.



LEFT PITTSBURGH HISTORY & LANDMARKS FOUNDATION, RIGHT COURTESY SPANIERMAN GALLERY, LLC



75_{years}

THE HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Eulogy

in Black and White

by Joe Flanagan

RICHARD NICKEL'S LAST STAND ON THE FRONTIER OF URBAN RENEWAL

The bulldozers started rolling shortly after World War II. Victory brought the dawn of a limitless future, and America plunged headlong into the American century. Forward, upward, new—this was the currency of the time, pursued relentlessly and without looking back. By the 1960s, urban renewal had changed the face of the nation's cities. Wide swaths were demolished: entire blocks, entire neighborhoods, entire business districts, all razed to make way for the new. Nothing was spared. Nothing would ever be the same. The wholesale erasure of the past was, in part, inspired by the ideas of Swiss architect Le Corbusier. But it had very practical origins, too. Urban renewal was seen as a way to clear out the slums, get rid of “obsolete” buildings, make space for an exploding population, and accommodate the burgeoning car culture.

Left: The Republic Building, an extraordinary example of Chicago School architecture designed by Holabird and Roche and built in the early 1900s. The structure—which became yet another casualty of the city's take-no-prisoners approach to redevelopment—was still standing when Richard Nickel turned up to take the images in this article, now in the archives of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Nickel depicts the building as both specimen and character, a signature technique of his photographic art.

ALL PHOTOS RICHARD NICKEL/MPHABS EXCEPT AS NOTED

The destruction was particularly tragic in Chicago, a trove of American architectural genius. It is the crusade of a lone photographer, however, that lends such poignancy to the period. Richard Nickel scoured the streets of the city, often turning his lens on its treasures mere days before the wrecking ball swung. His story unfolds just as the preservation movement was coming into its own, reflecting a growing consciousness of the past in the wake of what was being destroyed. As in other aspects of life in the 1960s, the changes were momentous, the result a national soul-searching as to whether business-as-usual was indeed a good thing. Today, appropriately, a rich sampling of Nickel's art—including the visual poetry he saw in the now-destroyed Republic Building, pictured in this article—resides in the archives of the National Park Service Historic American Buildings Survey, which celebrates its 75th anniversary this year.

Just out of the Army in 1948, Richard Nickel was an amateur photographer attending the Chicago Institute of Design, founded by Hungarian expatriate László Moholy-Nagy, a former teacher from Germany's Bauhaus. Ideas forbidden under Hitler flourished, with the institute a place of note to art world luminaries of the time. Nickel enrolled under the GI Bill with modest hopes of becoming a commercial cameraman, but influenced by Moholy-Nagy's ideas and the institute's Bauhaus-inspired philosophy, he found himself on another pursuit altogether: perfecting himself as an artist.

Students were urged to abandon preconceived notions of beauty and start with a blank slate. Spontaneity was the objective; instinct the key. Before long, Nickel stood out for the freshness and power of his compositions. For a class assignment, he photographed the Jewelers' Building, a mercantile structure designed in 1881 by Louis

Nickel and his classmates, drawn to Sullivan's work, formed a small production company to photograph as many of his buildings as they could. The result, a 1954 student exhibit, was a eulogy to the priceless treasures becoming dust all around Chicago. Nickel wrote his graduate thesis on Sullivan's architecture, embarking on a quest to photograph obscure works in faraway Utah, Iowa, Minnesota, Ohio, and New York. In 1956, Horizon Press commissioned a book based on the photos he and his classmates had taken.

The New City

The changes transforming American cities grew, in part, from the ideas of Le Corbusier, whose philosophy of urban life guided much of the postwar rebuilding. He fervently believed that technology and engineering could vastly improve human existence, in cities designed as machines—functional, efficient, and clean. Nature was part of his vision as well—it is said that there was “an essential humanism” in his concepts—but that was hijacked by would-be imitators and municipal authorities working on tight budgets. Urban renewal in America was a backlash against what was seen as the old, cramped, dark cities of another time. “Obsolete” was a word that accompanied the bulldozers into one city after another. Real estate speculators, bred by the boom, fostered the destruction.

By the late 1950s, Chicago's treasures—notably its Adler and Sullivan buildings—were fast disappearing. Nickel stored salvaged decorative pieces in his parents' home, where he moved after a failed marriage. He hung around the frontier of urban renewal, haunting lonely blocks and blasted out streets, often, in his words, “the only person at the wrecking site when a Sullivan building was being

RICHARD NICKEL SCoured THE STREETS OF THE CITY, OFTEN

TURNING HIS LENS ON ITS TREASURES MERE DAYS BEFORE THE WRECKING BALL SWUNG. HIS STORY UNFOLDS JUST AS THE PRESERVATION MOVEMENT WAS COMING INTO ITS OWN, REFLECTING A GROWING CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE PAST IN THE WAKE OF WHAT WAS BEING DESTROYED. AS IN OTHER ASPECTS OF LIFE IN THE '60S, THE CHANGES WERE MOMENTOUS, THE RESULT A NATIONAL SOUL-SEARCHING AS TO WHETHER BUSINESS-AS-USUAL WAS INDEED A GOOD THING.

Sullivan. It was the start of a lifelong obsession with the famed architect, who was a mentor to Frank Lloyd Wright.

Sullivan, who with his business partner Dankmar Adler created some of the nation's first high-rises, was renowned for his use of organic ornamentation. His buildings boasted a lavishness not seen in later variants of the form, richly decorated with masonry, cast iron, and terra cotta. The ornament seemed at odds with a phrase attributed to him—“form follows function”—yet it had a civilizing effect on the building's scale, acknowledging the modern city while embracing another era, staid and expressive at the same time. Imposing and all business, they digressed from function in ways playful and somber, with images of griffins, angels, human faces, and plants on textured block facades. It was as if a romantic had been asked to design a city. Other Chicago School architects took the cue, as in the Republic Building shown here.

demolished.” When a salvage item was too heavy, he sometimes convinced the wreckers to help him load it into his car. Richard Cahan and Michael Williams write in their book, *Richard Nickel's Chicago: Photographs of a Lost City*, “While others in Chicago celebrated the

Right: The Republic in 1960, the year it was torn down to make way for a steel and glass skyscraper designed by architectural firm Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. For Nickel, it wasn't just architecture that was being lost but a sense of identity and place. To underscore the loss, he went out of his way to show city life teeming around his subjects.





NICKEL STORED

building boom that promised to revitalize the aging city, Nickel soldiered on in the trenches of preservation and memory.”

The small masterpieces in the neighborhoods went first, followed by the downtown landmarks. Says Ward Miller, executive director of the Richard Nickel Committee and Archive, “People resigned themselves to the fact that there was a certain life to a house and [just] threw up their hands . . . when it came to downtown, it was different.” There was a push against the superstructures that would redefine the landscape. “There was excitement that the city was getting these new landmarks by the likes of Mies van der Rohe and Skidmore, Owings and Merrill,” he says, “but also acknowledgement of the terrible cost.”

Taking a Stand

Before the 1950s were over, Nickel was a battered veteran of his own preservation movement. He watched beautiful buildings knocked down one after the other. Word got out that several early skyscrapers were to be torn down. “Now I am pulling out of it,” he wrote. “Buildings are coming down on all sides.” But when he heard they were going to demolish Adler and Sullivan’s Garrick Theater, the acclaimed 1892 opera house, Nickel stepped back into the fray.

By 1960, the Garrick’s grandeur had faded considerably. In *They All Fall Down: Richard Nickel’s Struggle to Save America’s Architecture*, author Richard Cahan writes, “Cheap rents attracted private detectives, phrenologists, and ne’er-do-well attorneys.” There had been successive bad remodels, the ground floor occupied by a Ham n’ Egger restaurant. But beneath all that Sullivan’s vision could still be seen.

The Garrick had the architect’s signature colonnaded arches and terra cotta on its outer face, which gave the effect, in Cahan’s words, of “a fluid, undulating skin.” The theater itself, which started in the waning days of opera and then became a prominent venue for vaudeville, was surrounded by offices.

Nickel began photographing inside and out. He came up with numerous ways in which the Garrick could work in a new capacity—as offices, studios, a hotel—anything. As the demolition neared, he wrote to architects all over the world, urging them to protest. He hunted down an old Sullivan associate and asked him to intervene.

Chicago had formed a landmarks commission in 1957—and even passed a preservation ordinance—but they were largely ineffective. In

SALVAGED DECORATIVE PIECES IN HIS PARENTS’ HOME, WHERE

1959, the commission presented a plaque to the owners of the Garrick, designating it a “primary landmark.” This did nothing to alter plans to make it a parking lot. Nickel teamed with activist Thomas Stauffer to fight the demolition. It almost worked. Letters and telegrams poured in. Frank Lloyd Wright’s widow sent a message to Mayor Daley. Le Corbusier himself wrote, as did other renowned architects, artists, and scholars. Nickel and others picketed the theater. Says Jonathan Fine, executive director of Preservation Chicago, “It was the mood of the times. [People] had been battered by the interstate highway system and

Left and below: Details of the Republic, whose demise mirrored in microcosm the fate of the city. During the urban renewal era, Chicago’s nascent preservation movement wrangled over one building after another, fighting against powerful developers and a craze for the new.



HE MOVED AFTER A FAILED MARRIAGE. HE HUNG AROUND THE FRONTIER OF URBAN RENEWAL, HAUNTING LONELY BLOCKS AND BLASTED OUT STREETS, OFTEN, IN HIS WORDS, “THE ONLY PERSON AT THE WRECKING SITE WHEN A SULLIVAN BUILDING WAS BEING DEMOLISHED.” WHEN A SALVAGE ITEM WAS TOO HEAVY, HE SOMETIMES CONVINCED THE WRECKERS TO HELP HIM LOAD IT INTO HIS CAR.

Le Corbusier's nightmarish vision of what our cities were going to look like. By '60, '61, [they] had had enough." With the Garrick suddenly hot, Daley held a hearing in the city council chambers, with the developers denied a demolition permit while the city studied alternatives.

The developers sued. The building's fate hung in the balance for months, but in the end it was torn down, the wreckage laid out in a giant shed at Navy Pier, including "the plaster ornaments and pieces from the proscenium of the theater," says Miller. Since a commercial contractor was too expensive to do the salvage, Nickel was hired, the work funded largely by the American Institute of Architects, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the landmarks commission. By then he had attracted a following of kindred idealists. "It was just him and his band of architecture students, really," says Miller. "They worked in dangerous conditions, often with the wrecking ball just over their shoulder." In the end, he says, the salvaged pieces were shipped to institutions around the world.



RICHARD CAHAN AND MICHAEL WILLIAMS WRITE IN THEIR

Above: Shoppers at street level in one of the Republic's theatrical public spaces. Right: "With a white glazed terra-cotta façade that gleamed in the sunlight, and a sweeping bronze and marble arcade, [it] was a gem," writes Richard Cahan of the Republic in They All Fall Down: Richard Nickel's Struggle to Save America's Architecture.

Surveying a Shattered Heritage

Around this time, HABS came to Chicago, where a National Park Service report from the period noted "the sharply rising rate of destruction." Local architect Earl Reed, an old preservation hand who had an association with HABS, sponsored the work. To make measured drawings of what the report called "the complex Chicago skyscrapers," the teams used photogrammetry, an expensive technique at the time. Local institutions and private donors gave financial support to make it possible. The city provided an architectural historian, and the Illinois Institute of Technology made its dormitories available to HABS staff.

HABS, established in 1933 as a way to hire out-of-work architects under FDR's New Deal, set out to be "a complete resume of the builder's art," said founder Charles Peterson, a record of the nation's story told through the built environment. The effort achieved success throughout the decade, but World War II put a damper on it. In 1956, the National Park Service launched Mission 66—a campaign to rehabilitate park visitor centers, roads, and accommodations, with a number of historical sites to be added to the system. These sites needed to be documented, and HABS was revitalized to take on the job. The idea of a nationwide survey had not been abandoned; in fact, now there was new urgency. Superhighways were slicing through communities urban and rural, with suburbs steadily creeping outward from the city.

Reinvigorated, HABS took on increasingly diverse projects. The goal was to record 100 sites per year and photograph another thousand. The survey conducted research on preserving structures, too, becoming a proving ground for increased federal involvement in preservation. As in the '30s, HABS cast a wide lens on the built environment, including in its sweep "urban and rural, secular and profane, vernacular and high style," from log structures in Montana and cottages on Cape Cod to landmarks in the big cities.

In Chicago, 31 buildings were documented with drawings, large format photography, and written histories, among them landmarks that were to be preserved, and destroyed. HABS made several return trips, its work made possible by the passion of local preservationists, architects, and historic building aficionados. Also instrumental was Wilbert R. Hasbrouck, who headed the preservation commission of the Chicago chapter of the AIA. Nickel made uneasy alliances with this emerging preservation establishment, taking a hard line when

BOOK, RICHARD NICKEL'S CHICAGO: PHOTOGRAPHS OF A LOST CITY, "WHILE OTHERS IN CHICAGO CELEBRATED THE BUILDING BOOM THAT PROMISED TO REVITALIZE THE AGING CITY, NICKEL SOLDIERED ON IN THE TRENCHES OF PRESERVATION AND MEMORY."





economic and political realities left practically no room to bargain. Shy by nature, he agitated by writing letters to editors, politicians, and well-known architects.

As the '60s wore on, Nickel fought for one doomed building after another. The Cable. The Republic. The Hammond Library. The Blumenfeld House. The city often paid him to photograph them before their demise. He called the replacement buildings “gaudy and superficial”; the only things recommending them, he said, were the “air conditioning and automatic elevators.”

Nickel's pictures were part record, part homage, part indictment. Cahan likens his photography to a private tour. “He offers rewards to those who look carefully,” he writes. “A window washer hangs from the 8th floor of the Monadnock Building's façade, and an array of

A Death Mask of America

In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson convened the “Task Force on the Preservation of Natural Beauty.” Out of that came the message that the nation's legacy was in serious trouble. A special committee of the U.S. Conference of Mayors traveled to Europe to observe preservation practices, then delivered a report to the 89th Congress. Published by

NICKEL'S PICTURES WERE PART RECORD, PART HOMAGE, PART



terra cotta eagles, gargoyles, griffins, and filigreed pinnacles sits atop the North American Building.” Developers called the structures “dinosaurs,” but in Nickel's lens they were drama. He once said he tried to remain calm while photographing his subjects—his early photographs are clearly more objective—but Cahan writes that “helplessness and anger” found their way into his later work.

Previous pages: Original display cases—the structure boasted one of the first multi-level shopping centers—with the words “The Republic” on the back wall next to a clock frozen in time. Above and right: The interior of the building, a vacant and ghostly presence on the eve of its demise. The Republic was to be demolished to make way for an office tower for Home Federal Savings and Loan Association. Nickel tried to convince designers Skidmore, Owings and Merrill that the association could use the Republic as is. But there was no interest from the architectural firm, then making a name for itself with sleek new designs. Nickel wrote asking, “May I inquire what is so grand about a glass slab with aluminum strips running down the side?”

INDICTMENT. CAHAN LIKENS HIS PHOTOGRAPHY TO A PRIVATE TOUR. “HE OFFERS REWARDS TO THOSE WHO LOOK CAREFULLY,” HE WRITES: “A WINDOW WASHER HANGS FROM THE 8TH FLOOR OF THE MONADNOCK BUILDING'S FAÇADE, AND AN ARRAY OF TERRA COTTA EAGLES, GARGOYLES, GRIFFINS, AND FILIGREED PINNACLES SITS ATOP THE NORTH AMERICAN BUILDING.” DEVELOPERS CALLED THE STRUCTURES “DINOSAURS,” BUT IN NICKEL'S LENS THEY WERE DRAMA.

Random House as *With Heritage So Rich*, it became a rallying cry for the preservation movement. Of all the buildings that HABS had surveyed, said the book, half had been either destroyed or mutilated. The HABS collections, it said, looked like a “death mask of America.” The federal government needed to take the reins, said the authors. Its agencies—many of which had fostered the destruction—needed to make preservation part of their missions. The report cited HABS as a ray of hope in an otherwise bleak landscape.

The next year saw the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act. Historic structures that would be affected by federal projects—or work that was federally funded—now had to be documented to standards issued by the Secretary of the Interior, which were based primarily on HABS standards. The Act required all states to complete an inventory of important sites, and the HABS approach became the model for the work.

In 1968, the Chicago city council approved the creation of the Commission on Historical and Architectural Landmarks, and with it the municipality's first binding preservation law. The same year, developers bought Adler and Sullivan's 1894 Stock Exchange on La Salle Street. The





THE WRANGLING

WENT ON THROUGH THE LATE '60S AND INTO THE '70S, BUT THE STOCK EXCHANGE WAS DOOMED . . . IN APRIL 1972, NICKEL WENT IN ALONE, DISAPPEARING INTO THE NOW RUINED BUILDING. HIS WHEREABOUTS REMAINED A MYSTERY FOR EIGHT WEEKS, UNTIL WORKERS FOUND HIS BODY IN A PILE OF RUBBLE. WEAKENED BY THE DEMOLITION, THE FLOOR TO THE TRADING ROOM HAD COLLAPSED.

commission included the structure in its list of buildings designated for preservation, but the council voted it down. The developers, who had powerful connections, had invested millions in the property. It was the start of an emotional and protracted fight, in many ways mirroring the struggle to save the Garrick, except “this one everybody got,” says Miller. The newly formed Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois, a private group, led the campaign. Known today as Landmarks Illinois, it would go on to become one of the most prominent players in the local preservation scene. Lisa DiChiera, the group’s director of advocacy, cites the battle over the Stock Exchange as the seminal moment in Chicago preservation. Nickel, who Cahan describes as “fed up and cynical” by this point, got involved once again.

The wrangling went on through the late '60s and into the '70s, but the Stock Exchange was doomed. Nickel’s friend John Vinci was hired to salvage the architectural ornament. Vinci hired Nickel, and they spent endless hours inside the Exchange taking photographs and removing decorative pieces, struggling to stay ahead of the wreckers. In April 1972, Nickel went in alone, disappearing into the now ruined building. His whereabouts remained a mystery for eight weeks, until workers found his body in a pile of rubble. Weakened by the demolition, the floor to the trading room had collapsed.

On the Bones of the Stock Exchange

“The preservation movement in Chicago was built on the bones of the Stock Exchange,” says Miller. The following years brought more big

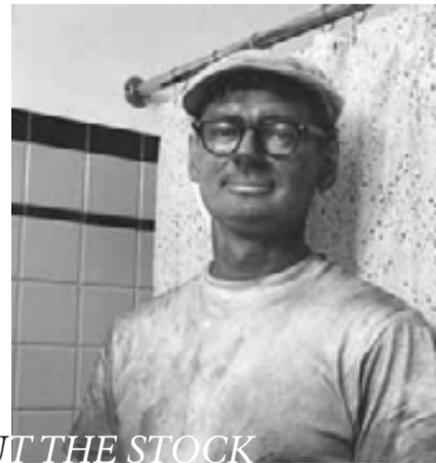
battles. “That’s when the movement became more sophisticated,” says Fine. “It started to mature in the '70s and '80s.”

A host of landmarks did survive urban renewal, among them Frank Lloyd Wright’s Robie House, Sullivan’s Auditorium Building and Carson Pirie Scott Store, the Rookery, the Monadnock Building, and the Chicago Library. But the threat remains ever-present. “Neighborhoods are under siege again where they weren’t for a long time,” says Miller. “Small developers are picking houses out one by one, tearing them down and replacing them with cut and dried standard units.” The city’s 1968 preservation ordinance has, on occasion, been circumvented by creative interpretations and political considerations. Early this year, Preservation Chicago’s endangered list included the ordinance itself. “It’s the first time we’ve ever put an idea on the list,” says Fine.

Left: The Republic lords over the streets of Chicago, gazing down majestically from grand heights. These images and those of many other Chicago landmarks are housed today at the Library of Congress as part of the Historic American Buildings Survey collection. Right: A self-portrait, Nickel covered with grime from salvaging pieces of the buildings he loved.

But there have been successes, too. Since its inception, the city landmarks commission has designated over 300 properties, including 50 districts. For the past 10 years, it has hosted the Great Chicago Places and Spaces festival, a celebration of architecture with 250 free tours.

And the Historic American Buildings Survey, as it celebrates its 75th anniversary this year, remains arguably one of the most enlightened concepts in preservation. Its collection at the Library of Congress is part scholarly analysis and part family album, both tribute and technical archive. It is fitting that Richard Nickel’s photographs can be found there, in the company of the American pantheon of buildings, where his work is neither lonely nor futile.



For more information, visit the HABS website at www.nps.gov/history/hdp/habs/index.htm, or email HABS chief Catherine Lavoie at catherine_lavoie@nps.gov. The HABS collection at the Library of Congress can be viewed at http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/habs_haer/. Visit the Richard Nickel Archive and Committee website at www.richardnickelcommittee.org.

ABOVE RICHARD NICKEL, COURTESY OF THE RICHARD NICKEL COMMITTEE, CHICAGO, IL

75 years

THE HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

AN ISLAND IN TIME

by Brian Joyner

IN THE NEVER-ENDING DRIVE TOWARD CULTURAL UBIQUITY—WITH A COFFEE franchise on every corner and a numbing sameness to our built environment—places such as Natchitoches, Louisiana are rare. A transportation hub of what until the mid-19th century was the American Southwest, it is a reminder of what traveling around the nation once meant: distinctive cuisine, traditions, accents, and landscapes freighted with their own cultural history. In the modern context, Natchitoches is, in short, a funky little place. Today it anchors the north end of the 35-mile Cane River National Heritage Area, created by Congress in 1994 to preserve a broad stretch of the Deep South that has changed little over the centuries. It is rich with traditions that carry a visitor all the way back to the French colonial era. Its wealth of historic sites—including seven national historic landmarks and a national park—tells the story of the early European presence, slavery, plantation life, the cotton economy, and the changes wrought by 20th century mechanization. Its importance, as expressed in the literature published by the national heritage area, is in its “unique contribution to the American experience.”

Right: Plantation outbuilding in Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana. Known as “Piece-Sur-Piece” from a French construction technique, these structures are now rare in the region. “This is a remarkable survivor,” says Paul Dolinsky, who managed the HABS documentation reported in this article and is now chief of the National Park Service Historic American Landscapes Survey. Piece-sur-Piece buildings were purpose-built structures disassembled and moved as need arose.



JACK BOUCHER/NPS/HABS



THIS SPREAD JAMES ROSENTHAL/NPS/HABS

THE ALLUVIAL SOIL MAKES FOR

LUSH, DENSE VEGETATION. HARDWOOD TREES

flourish. Armadillos wander across the interstate. Waterfowl swoop down into swamps and bogs. Trees stand out of the water on their roots, giving a primordial feel. Wetlands once divided much of the area, creating individual islands. While much has filled in, the geographical separation still exists.

The national heritage area concept is relatively recent, a way to gather historic and cultural sites into a loose confederation to promote preservation and heritage tourism. Typically, the areas are characterized by a geographical feature that defines the warp of history in the place, with the National Park Service lending its imprimatur and providing assistance.

About the time the area was designated, the Historic American Buildings Survey of the National Park Service arrived to document the rare and irreplaceable architecture. Through a combination of factors—one of them that nature had separated the Cane River from the Red River, effectively ending the life of Natchitoches as a port—much of the landscape has remained unaltered. And yet it is completely adapted to the needs of its occupants. The project was an opportunity to document perhaps the most compelling cultural landscape in the survey's 75-year history. All this interest stirred a certain amount of discomfort along the river, whose little communities had been moving along at their own pace, relatively unbothered by the rest of the world.

Splendid Isolation

The drive from Shreveport to Natchitoches takes you south along the Red River on Interstate 49, then due east on Route 6. It's 70 miles at most. That's the drive—the trip is a whole other matter. This is not the stereotypical South. The alluvial soil makes for lush, dense vegetation. Hardwood trees flourish. Armadillos wander across the interstate. Waterfowl swoop down into swamps and bogs. Trees stand out of the water on their roots, giving a primordial feel. Wetlands once divided much of the area, creating individual islands. While much has filled in, the geographical separation still exists.

In many ways, Natchitoches Parish very much *is* an island. A French-Catholic enclave amidst Anglo-Protestant northern Louisiana, it is more connected to the French heritage that dominates the southeastern portions of the state. Established in 1714 by Louis Juchereau de St. Denis as a military fort, it is the oldest permanent settlement in the Louisiana Purchase territory. Because of its access to the Mississippi and its tributaries, Natchitoches became a hub for trade with the indigenous peoples of the region (the Caddo), as well as the Spanish colonies in Texas. The town hugs the Cane River, which made it a natural port.

Left: The porch, or "galerie," a characteristic detail in the Cane River region. Suited to the climate of the South, it served as a distinct social space, a transition between indoors and out. Right: Front Street in downtown Natchitoches, the commercial center from the Antebellum era to the turn of the century. Fronting the Cane River, it is part of the national historic landmark district that anchors the heritage area.

As part of the Treaty of Paris in 1763, which ended the Seven Years' War (called the French and Indian War in the United States), France ceded Louisiana to Spain. It was during this period that the importation of African slaves transformed the region from a frontier trade economy to a plantation system. The state briefly returned to French hands in 1801, until the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 turned the whole of French colonial America over to the United States.



THE PROJECT WAS AN OPPORTUNITY TO DOCUMENT PERHAPS THE MOST COMPELLING CULTURAL LANDSCAPE IN THE SURVEY'S

By the time of the Louisiana Purchase, a distinct group of African, French, and Spanish peoples known as Creoles had become prevalent in Natchitoches and throughout the region. The term “Creole” has different meanings depending on where you are, but the term (as well as the Spanish *criollo*) inferred people of full French or Spanish blood born in the New World. In Natchitoches, it referred to those who claimed French ancestry and cultural affiliation. This meant whites and people of color both called themselves Creole.

Marie Thérèse Coincoin—emancipated in 1778 by French merchant Jean Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer, with whom she had 10 children—is considered the matriarch of the Cane River Creoles. A successful businesswoman, she owned a sizable amount of property. Her son, Augustin Metoyer, established the home church for the Cane River Creoles of color, St. Augustine Catholic Church, which remains a cultural centerpiece for the community today. Another son, Louis Metoyer, owned Melrose Plantation. Cotton was king in

the plantation economy. The soil was ideal for growing, the area filled with people looking to capitalize on relatively uninhabited lands throughout the parish. Farms large and small, with associated housing and machinery, dotted the landscape. From 1804 until the end of the Civil War, the cotton economy grew, bringing wealth and prestige to Natchitoches. Rail service

replaced the river as the prime source of transport, allowing the city to continue as a commercial hub through the first part of the 20th century. But the railroad also led locals—particularly formerly enslaved African Americans and their descendants—out of the fields south to Alexandria and New Orleans for opportunities in factories and other industries. The advent of the automobile did not slow the exodus, and the eventual demise of rail travel took the vitality out of Natchitoches. With the decline of cotton, it stagnated.

Vibrant Heritage

Despite the changes in its socioeconomic landscape, Natchitoches is not without its charms. The Natchitoches National Historic Landmark District is filled with two-story homes with multiple porches, or galleries, as they are known here. The Ducournau Building, a former hotel in downtown renovated for office and retail space, still displays its wrought iron railings on the second-level galerie, now used as seating for a restaurant looking out onto the river. Down the brick-lined

Above: Carnahan's Store in Cloutierville. Until it burned down in 2004, Carnahan's was a rare surviving example of a country store in the Cane River area. Says Dolinsky, "The HABS documentation is the only permanent archive of that building's story." Right: Structure housing a defunct cotton gin, remnant of what was once the most prominent industry.

75-year history. All this interest stirred a certain amount of discomfort along the river, whose little communities had been moving along at their own pace, relatively unbothered by the rest of the world.



THIS SPREAD JACK BOUCHER/NPS/HABS



COTTON WAS KING IN THE PLANTATION ECONOMY. THE SOIL WAS IDEAL FOR growing, the area filled with people looking to capitalize on relatively uninhabited lands throughout the parish. Farms large and small, with associated housing and machinery, dotted the landscape.

street is Kaffie-Frederick General Mercantile, the oldest general store in the state. There is a leisurely, southern feel. Most stores close by 5 and everyone knows their neighbors. It could be the setting for a story of manners and friendship. *Steel Magnolias* was filmed here, based on the screenplay by Robert Harling, Jr., a native and owner of Oaklawn, an 1830 French Creole plantation house in the National Register of Historic Places.

West of the historic district, the gentility gives way to a landscape of smaller single-level dwellings and industrial remnants. The neighborhood is primarily African American, spreading southwest to where Northwestern State University abuts College Avenue and the regional

to the river. In a contemporary GIS map drawn by the National Park Service from original plat books, one sees the arpents, as the plots are called, coming off of the river like long, thin spokes. The *allées* of trees that divide the properties, still maintained, are a signature part of the landscape. A quick stop at Cherokee Plantation allows for a look at the big house. With its well-preserved exterior, it is an excellent example of a French Louisiana plantation house with Creole-influenced construction techniques. Photographs do not do it justice. It is magnificent. Privately owned, it is open for tours by appointment.

The “big houses”—places like Oaklawn and Cherokee, where the plantation owners lived and raised their families—are the main



freight rail tracks. The Texas and Pacific Railway Depot, a building with Italianate design and Spanish Revival touches, awaits revitalization. Built in 1927, it was a place to work for the adults and a place to play for children, when trains were not passing through. A cultural center is slated to occupy the building, which will include interpretation of the African American story in Natchitoches.

Due east are the farms and plantations that provided the wealth. During its heyday, Natchitoches Parish was also known for quarter horses; today, corn, wheat, and soybeans are the staples. On the ride down river, one is continually struck by the dense lushness. The idea of clearing land must have been daunting.

A Complicated History

As Laura Gates, superintendent of Cane River Creole National Historical Park, drives along the river, some of the recently harvested winter wheat fields are being burned to ready the soil for the next crop. There are clouds of smoke and the air smells of burnt wood and dried straw. Gates points out that the plots were divided so each had access



attractions for most visitors who venture down river, the area lined with such remnants of the old South. Cane River Creole National Historical Park, created at the same time as the heritage area, is comprised of two plantations, Oakland and Magnolia, 12 miles down river from each other. Associated buildings, barns, storage, kitchens, and quarters dot the rest of the landscape.

The quarters—initially for enslaved people and later used by sharecroppers and tenant farmers—are usually the places whose stories go unspoken. Gates and her interpretive staff use them to tell Cane River’s convoluted story of slavery, which does not follow the traditional narrative to which the public has grown accustomed. Slavery, the plantation system, and Louisiana’s *mélange* of cultures engendered a very complicated social environment. People of color owned

Left: A screw press for cotton at the complex pictured on the previous spread. Above left: Southwest view of the complex. Above right: Cotton brushes inside.

THIS SPREAD JOHN NICOLY/NPS/HAER

other people of color. The famous Marie Thérèse Coincoin held as many as 16 slaves.

The region was truly a world unto itself. At the former Melrose Plantation, one of the most-visited attractions, is a distinct structure known as Africa House. Built around 1800, it was likely used for storage. With an oversized hipped roof and large overhangs, some think it resembles a structure one might find in an African village. Others say it looks like something from rural France of the early 19th century. On the walls inside are the murals of self-taught artist Clementine Hunter, a long-time resident, whose brightly colored renditions of life here have won international acclaim, depicting a world where people depended as much on each another as they did on the river.

Capturing a Mythical South

The creation of the national heritage area and park brought the HABS recording teams to Natchitoches, but it wasn't the first time. During the Depression, when HABS was formed as a New Deal proj-



ect to employ out-of-work architects and draftsmen to document the nation's built heritage, this region was on the list. One architect's infatuation with the Lemeé House at 310 Jefferson Street led to the creation of the Association for the Preservation of Historic Natchitoches. The organization, recognizing that its town's heritage was in jeopardy, purchased the property. The APHN, which became a prominent force, now owns Melrose Plantation and the Kate Chopin House, home of the renowned author down the road in Cloutiersville. While indirectly spurring the preservation ethos prevalent here today, HABS then was viewed with the skepticism reserved for those outside of the community. Some 60 years later, the survey returned. Over five years, HABS made repeated visits to draw, measure, photograph, and research. Its sister groups, the Historic

Above: Melrose Plantation, built in 1833. Raised off the ground in the Louisiana French Colonial style, the big house was the center of one of Cane River's largest agricultural operations. Right: Oakland Plantation, built in 1821.



THIS SPREAD JACK BOUCHER/NPS/HABS



THE QUARTERS—INITIALLY FOR ENSLAVED PEOPLE AND LATER USED BY SHARECROPPERS AND tenant farmers—are usually the places whose stories go unspoken. Gates and her interpretive staff use them to tell Cane River’s convoluted story of slavery, which does not follow the traditional narrative to which the public has grown accustomed.

American Engineering Record and the Historic American Landscapes Survey, were part of the effort, as was the Cultural Resources Geographic Information Systems Unit of the National Park Service, which brought the latest technology to bear.

Creole architecture is a mix of types from European, African, and Native American traditions. Raised floors on posts, high-pitched roofs, and the use of bousillage, a mud-like material used for walls, are some of its characteristics. Natchitoches and New Orleans have some of the best examples, but the form can be found throughout what was once New France. This is what the HABS teams came to capture, along with remnants of the cotton industry (documented by HAER) and the distinctive system of arpents and *allées* (which HALS recorded as elements of the cultural landscape).

Nancy Morgan, former director of the national heritage area, was key in negotiating the balance between citizen apprehension and the goals of the documentation, says Paul Dolinsky, then-head of HABS and now chief of HALS. The teams produced drawings, large format photographs, and written histories of the most significant pieces of the region’s built environment, including comprehensive documentation of the Magnolia Cotton Gin Mill and the Badin-Roque House, one of only four remaining *poteaux en terre* (post in ground) structures left in the nation. A host of other places were recorded too, and the GIS unit produced a comprehensive, multi-layered map. In many ways, the work is one of the jewels in the HABS collection. The people got a rich document that tells their story, while the survey gained a relationship with a region. An exhibit of the photographs taken—

shown at the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training, a National Park Service program housed at Northwestern State University—engendered good will among the citizens, who saw in them their individual and collective stories. The diverse residents—country farmers, Creoles, people simply interested in preservation—found confluence in recognizing how special the place is. Thomas Whitehead, a retired professor of journalism at Northwestern State, said that the exhibit amounted to a social bonding. Morgan said that “it’s much easier to tell the story if you have the artifacts to connect to.”

The effort had a contagious effect. Now individual communities want to document their pasts and tell their stories. Katherine Johnson, assistant director of the national heritage area and a native of Natchitoches, sees in the growth of preservation the relinquishing of a mindset. Johnson’s role as head of a grants program puts her in touch with multiple factions, who have come to realize that the park, the heritage area, and the recurring visits of the people from the National Park Service give them a chance to get their stories told.

Dolinsky thinks that the signature *Piece-Sur-Piece* structure serves as a metaphor. Made of timbers and held together with mortise and tenon construction—with a dowel at the corners to pin them in place—the building could be disassembled and moved as need arose, either in its original function or for some other purpose entirely. It was ingenious yet simple, practical yet suggestive of a deep rural wisdom, changeable yet unchanging.



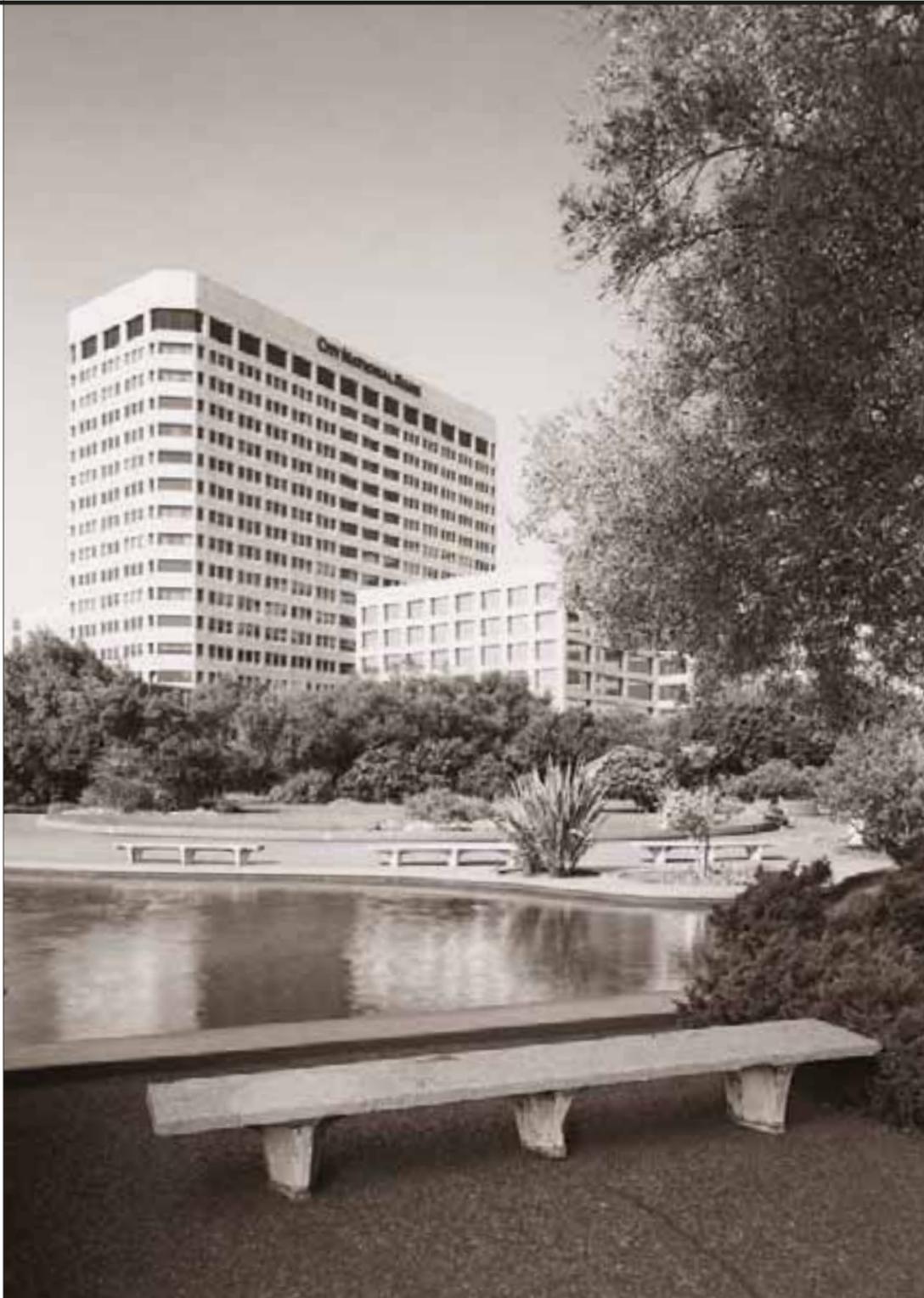
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Left: Artifacts of the mechanized age in the agricultural landscape. Above left: French influence in practical form: the once-pervasive Piece-Sur-Piece building. Above right: St. Augustine Catholic Church, a centerpiece of Creole culture, built in 1916. Its congregation has been a vital part of the Isle Brevelle community for two centuries.

THIS SPREAD: JAMES ROSENTHAL/NPS/HABS

ROOFTOP REVERIE

LOOKING AT THE ALUMINUM AND GLASS façade of Oakland's Henry J. Kaiser Building, one would never suspect that it hides the little woodland retreat pictured here. The three-acre rooftop garden, one of the largest in the world at the time of construction in 1960, contains mature trees, rolling lawns, a pond, and a footbridge. Roof gardens were not a new idea, but one on this scale certainly was, the first of its kind in an urban environment. **THE RETREAT HAD AN ADDED CACHE:** it was privately owned. Industrial tycoon Henry Kaiser, who lived in a penthouse on the 28th floor, reportedly did not like looking down at the roof of the parking garage—an appendage to the main building many floors below—so he commissioned a garden atop it. Celebrated as novel, it inspired similar gardens around the world, most of them public. **MIDCENTURY MODERN WAS IN FULL SWING** when the building was constructed at the edge of Lake Merritt. Its stark face and sweeping, curved shape raised eyebrows. Architectural writer Pierluigi Serraino wrote that it "looked like it had been dropped from the moon." Ansel Adams was so taken he photographed the structure reflected in the lake surface. The garden, designed by Osmundson & Staley, seemed the perfect accessory for such a brash building. **TODAY, IT IS A POPULAR PLACE TO RELAX** among the flowering cherry trees and magnolias. In 2007, it was recorded by the Historic American Landscapes Survey of the National Park Service, whose collection at the Library of Congress can be viewed online at www.nps.gov/hdp/hals/index.htm.



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